

“Child prodigies endure varied fates; the leap from prodigy to maestro is slippery. To meet a prodigy grown into a consummate musician, still child-like in his enthusiasm, is to meet Ravikiran”

Folk Roots (London, 1998)



ravikiran, the performer

In April 1969, a precocious two-year old boy made a dramatic debut on the world stage identifying 325 *ragas* (melodic scales), 175 *talas* (rhythmic cycles), and demonstrating knowledge of complex musical technicalities to legends including Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Pandit Ravi Shankar, M. S. Subbulakshmi, Flute Mali, Palghat Mani Iyer, T. N. Krishnan, Ramnad Krishnan, and Alla Rakha—a list that reads like a who's who of Carnatic music. Perhaps the first toddler to be awarded a monthly musical scholarship, the boy went on to become a full-fledged stage vocalist by age five. At ten years of age, he progressed to a *chitravina*, a delicate 21-stringed fretless lute that has “infinite capacity for micro-tonal shadings” (John Rockwell in The New York Times, 1988), displaying a panache and virtuosity beyond his years.

Nurtured by his own father, maestro Chitravina Narasimhan and veteran Carnatic vocalist, Sangeetha Kalanidhi T. Brinda, the child prodigy grew to become a vocalist and instrumentalist par excellence, celebrated worldwide for his mastery over both the rhythmic and melodic aspects of Carnatic music, vocal techniques and diction, as well as his unrelenting capacity for imagination and innovation. The Indian National Radio (AIR) and Television (Doordarshan) made history by inviting him to perform at age 12 and by elevating him to the highest (A-Top) grade when he was about 21 (about 40 years earlier than usual for those times). The Government of India's Cultural authority (ICCR) put him in their highest (Outstanding) category by age 20 and selected him to represent India in major events in various countries from age 18. In his journey to propagate the sublime charm of the *chitravina*, this remarkable musician, Chitravina N. Ravikiran, continues to win plaudits from scholars and connoisseurs alike.

“In Ravikiran's hands, the Chitravina expresses all the nuances of the human voice.”

Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers in NPR, 2005



instrumentalist and vocalist par excellence

Following his maiden *chitravina* performance in 1978, Ravikiran soon established himself among frontline performers, performing feature concerts in major events with legendary accompanists. He also pioneered unique techniques (below) to increase the scope of the *chitravina*, which together with his distinct ‘singing tone’ have enthralled music lovers and earned him world acclaim:

breathless slide: a technique where he plays 3-5 minute long slur-phrases with just one pluck of the string, a parallel to singing in one breath

fast left-hand passages which call for hand-speed to be at least four to six times that of violin, sitar, guitar, flute, etc.

super-slow sustain passages and harmonic improvisations

In collaboration with well-known instrument makers, Rikhi Ram of India, Ravikiran designed a modified version of the *chitravina* in 2001,

christening it the *navachitravina*. This sleek 20-stringed instrument incorporates structural modifications to produce a sharper tone in higher pitches, which makes it better suited for *jugalbandis* (collaborative concerts with other instruments, such as the guitar and sitar). Ravikiran's *navachitravina* has won much commendation in concerts presented all over the world.

Ravikiran debuted as a vocalist at age five, a record that remains unsurpassed, and soon acquired a repertoire of over 500 compositions and a mastery over the improvisational aspects of Carnatic music, including the *ragam-tanam-pallavi*, considered by many to be the *piece-de-resistance* in Carnatic music. Young Ravikiran's concerts attracted record crowds, and he now presents vocal recitals occasionally. His thematic vocal recitals on the works of venerated composers such as Tyagaraja and Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi have won him much acclaim.

ravikiran, the composer

Ravikiran was two years of age when he invented his first raga, *Choodamani*, which he named after his mother. He went on to create several more ragas, such as *Keshavapriya*, *Mohini*, *Snehapriya*, *Katyayani*, *Shivamanohari* and *Andhakarini*. His prolificacy has endured over the years, and today he has around 700 compositions to his credit, that include both the traditional and more diverse pieces for dance, operas, symphonies and television shows. Composing in five languages—Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Kannada—Ravikiran has covered a range of themes in musical forms, such as *varnam*, *krti*, *padam*, *javali*, *tillana*, and *chindu* (a folk melody), even creating a new form, *swarakrti*, that features only sol-fa passages.

Furthermore, Ravikiran has composed hundreds of short (*ragam-tanam*) *pallavis* live on stage, as well as numerous *korvais* (rhythmic cadenzas).



His unique works , such as *Pancha-raga-tala-jati-malika tillana*, *Dasha-Ranjani Tillana*, *Raga-bhasha-malika krtis*, *Navaraga malika ragaakshara pallavi*, *Tillana in Chatushra-tishra gati* that employ *swarakshara* (where the word matches the solfa note) offer a captivating experience for all senses. While most of Ravikiran's compositions adhere to the rules of classical Indian rhyme, from time to time, he intentionally deviates from the conventional path and explores new musical frontiers. Blending innovation with intricacy, playfulness with sophistication, Ravikiran's compositions are peppered with alliterations, word play, *swaraksharas*, and, on occasion, *raga-mudra* (incorporating the name of the raga in the lyrics).

Ravikiran's compositions have been performed by top world artists and orchestras.

achievements

only composer to have composed in each of the 35 *talas* of Carnatic music

only composer to have composed whole piece with only descending phrases in Carnatic music (*sada nin padame*)

first to have composed pieces with only descending phrases in world music (*Descent Trilogy*)

first Indian to have composed caprices for Western solo violin

first to have composed the 72-mela *ragamalika geetam*, a unique formula-piece appropriate for both practice and performance

only composer to have composed a Symphonic piece featuring the 72 parent scales of Carnatic music

Ravikiran has composed original music & lyrics for productions across USA, Canada, Australia and India such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Lakshmi Prabhavam*, *Vinayaka Vaibhavam*, *Savithri*, *Panchakriya*, *Cosmos* and *Translation*.

“...the Mozart of Indian Music...”

Wisconsin State Journal, USA

Ravikiran's most significant contribution to world music is *melharmony*, an award-winning cross-cultural concept that attempts to create a synergy between the melodic concepts of Indian music, with the harmonic dimensions of Western music. Melharmony aims to (1) showcase and appreciate the similarities and contrasts between Western and Indian classical music; (2) bring harmony and texture into fundamentally melodic systems; (3) highlight melodic concepts to audiences used to

harmony; and (4) project intricate melo-rhythmic patterns in an interesting manner. Melharmony was initiated in 2000 at the Millennium Festival in UK, and has led to melharmonic concerts, collaborations, and academic papers. The Mayor the city of Middleton, WI declared the third Saturday of every November as Melharmony Day. Ravikiran also introduced Melharmony in US school districts through compositions for their orchestras.

m e l h a r m o n y

harmony and vertical layers of music with an emphasis on the rules and principles of highly evolved melodic systems

Ravikiran's melharmonic creations include original compositions and arrangements for full-scale symphonies, smaller classical/jazz ensembles as well as caprices for soloists. He has introduced modes/scales novel to the West but based on Indian ragas like *Hamsadhwani*, *Nattai*, *Dhavalambari* and *Janaranjani*. He is the first to create melharmonic arrangements based on works of traditional Indian composers such as Tyagaraja (1767-1847), Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi (1700-65) and Muttuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835). For school levels, Ravikiran has created melharmonic interpretations of short pieces (*geetams/kritis*) arranged for piano, strings and/or winds. His compositions have influenced composers such as Polivios Issariotis.

Melharmony is an exciting approach that is inherently complex because the approaches to melody-centric and harmony-based systems are often distinct. An audience accustomed to harmonic systems might not find melodic systems appealing and wholesome, and vice versa. Since melodic systems are governed by precise rules, composing melharmonically requires a keen awareness of the harmonic potential of a raga's melodic structure, which depends on its scale, sequence, hierarchy of notes, ornamentation and key phrases. It is against this background that Ravikiran's melharmony is revolutionary. Ravikiran hopes to create a new set of aesthetics and rules of desirable chords with respect to each individual mode raga that will enable any composer in any part of the world to create melharmonically.

Collaborations

BBC Philharmonic, Cleveland Opera, Sacramento Youth Symphony, blues/jazz/world exponent Taj Mahal, Larry Coryell, George Brooks, Roland van Campenhout and composers such as Prof Robert Morris. His ensemble *ta ki Ta Trio* with 4-time Grammy winner Glen Velez and Lori Cotler has won much acclaim.

Academic acceptance

In 2005, distinguished composer Prof Robert Morris (Eastman School of Music, NY) presented a significant paper titled: Ravikiran's concept of Melharmony: an inquiry into Harmony in South Indian Ragas (The Society for Music Theory Conference, Boston, USA). Ravikiran has presented papers in conferences such as *India and the World* (Amsterdam) and *Indian Musico-logical Conference* (Mumbai).

Spectrum

Matthew Bribitzer-Stull

The Ab-C-E Complex: The Origin and Function of Chromatic Major Third Collections in Nineteenth-Century Music

Marion A. Guck

Analysis as Interpretation: Interaction, Intentionality, Invention

David Huron and Ann Ommen

An Empirical Study of Syncopation in American Popular Music, 1890-1939

Judy Lochhead

"How Does It Work?": Challenges to Analytic Explanation

Robert Morris and Chitravina N. Ravikiran

Ravikiran's Concept of Melharmony



PROCLAMATION

Melharmony Day in Middleton—November 16, 2013

- Whereas,** The two major approaches to music in the world have been melody and harmony; and
- Whereas,** Even though the two systems evolved in parallel in various parts of the world over centuries; and
- Whereas,** Melodic music made great strides around the 1700s in India through composers such as Oottukkad: Venkata Kavi (OVK), Tyagaraja, Muttuswami Dikshitar, Shyama Shastri and others; and
- Whereas,** Just as the concept of Harmony scaled high peaks in the West around the same time through creators such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and others; and,
- Whereas,** The concept of Melharmony was conceptualized in the year 2000 by musician-composer Chitravina N Ravikiran to create music with harmony but with an emphasis on melodic rules; and,
- Whereas,** The United States has been committed to preserve, project and protect such diversity and innovations over the last several decades; and,
- Whereas,** One of the Wisconsin standards for music requires that students learn about music as it relates to history and culture, and a comparison of the approaches of these two 18th century styles will provide an invaluable insight into connections between the East and West at that time; and,
- Whereas,** Middleton desires to give its students practical exposure to such diverse and traditional forms of music by supporting cultural concepts and festivals such as the OVK-Bach Festival at the Middleton Performing Arts Center, Saturday, November 16.

Now, Therefore, I, Mayor Kurt Sonnentag, do hereby proclaim the third Saturday, November 16, 2013, and every third Saturday of November in subsequent years,

Melharmony Day

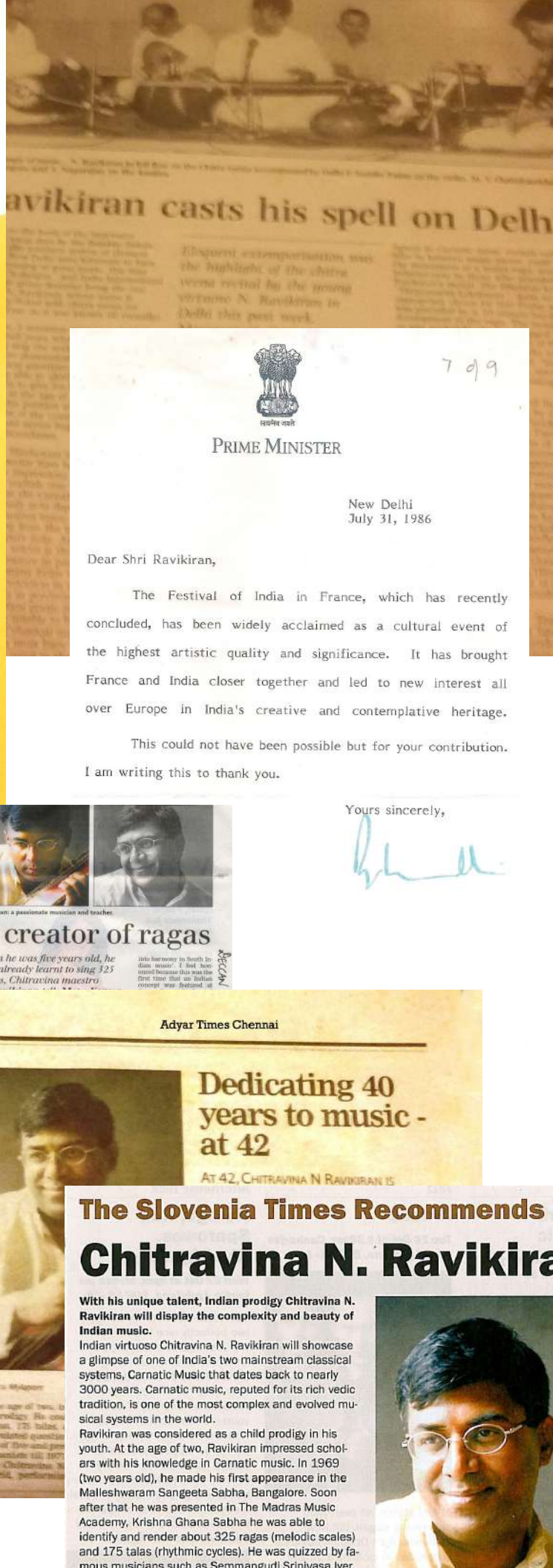
In the City of Middleton, and urge all citizens to support efforts strengthening our city's cultural programs; and,

Further, I urge all citizens to take part in such diverse cultural events to gladden the hearts and promote the well-being of present and future generations, and I thank Arohana School of Music & IFCM-USA for presenting this great opportunity to the citizens of Middleton.

This proclamation is made on this 12th day of November, 2013.

Kurt J. Sonnentag
Kurt J. Sonnentag, Mayor

ATTEST:
Lorie J. Burns
Lorie J. Burns, City Clerk





ravikiran, the guru

Ravikiran's first disciple was his mother Choodamani, who took lessons from him when he was five years old. More recently, Ravikiran was the only musician in the Indian Government's Core Committee for Music Education in Schools. He is also a Master Trainer in the Texas Folk Life Program and trains his disciples to be Master Trainers as well.

Ravikiran's success as an educator stems from his ardent passion to propagate Carnatic music and his ability to communicate with and tailor his teaching methods for students across age, experience, and instruments. He initiated a system of distance learning for Carnatic music in 1996 and more recently pioneered the *Flipped Classroom* model by adding video lessons of entire syllabi for primary and mid-level students online at www.acharya.net.

Ravikiran's experience, repertoire and vision have made him a teacher of choice for not only slide instrumentalists, but also aspirants of violin, veena, keyboard, guitar, as well as vocalists. Ravikiran has inspired and trained students from non-Southern Indian states, as well as citizens of USA, Canada, Japan, Korea, South Africa, Slovenia, France and Germany. His disciples include Presidential-Award winners, such as Akkarai Shubhalakshmi and other award-winning artists, A-top-graded artistes of Indian National Radio & TV, and winners of radio and TV shows.

Ravikiran works hard to de-regionalize and de-religionize music and continues to advocate for Carnatic music to be made accessible to children in rural areas.

author

Sada Sharanam - select compositions of Ravikiran (Swati Soft Solutions)

Adityodayam — select compositions of Ravikiran by Savita Narasimhan

Ravikiran has authored the following books, apart from critically ac-

claim papers in Journals and articles in leading dailies, and magazines:

Appreciating Carnatic Music

Perfecting Carnatic Music — Level I

Perfecting Carnatic Music — Level II

Compositions of Tanjavur Shankara Iyer

Inaiyatra Innishai — Level I

Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi - Life and Contributions

Saptaratnas and Navavaranaams of Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi

He has been cited or featured in a number of prominent books and audio/video guides to music., such as:

Encyclopedia of World Music (Garland Publishing, New York, 2000)

Oxford Encyclopedia — Music of India (2011)

Art of Steel Guitar (DeWitt Scott)

Geniuses of India (Sunder Rajan)

Pitch Analysis in South Indian Music (Madhu Mohan Komaragiri)

Varna Sagaram (Prof T K Govinda Rao)

collaborations

Though primarily a soloist, Ravikiran has occasionally performed with celebrated artists such as *Dr Bal-amuralikrishna, Girija Devi, Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Dr. N. Ramani, Prof. Nedanoori Krishnamurthy & R. K. Shrikanthan*. He has collaborated with iconic artistes including Pt. Birju Maharaj, Dr. Vyjayantimala Bali & Prof. C. V. Chandrashekar. In the area of world music, he has worked with and/or composed for artistes of the BBC Philharmonic, Sacramento Youth Symphony, Cleveland Opera, world/jazz/pop exponents including Taj Mahal, Glen Velez, Larry Coryell, George Brooks, John Bergamo, Lori Cotler, Roland van Campenhout, Martin Simpson, Hossain Alizadeh & Jovino Santos Neto.

outreach

Ravikiran has been involved in numerous charity, social and educational initiatives in various parts of the world from his teenage years. Some of his efforts include:

tsunami of 2004 and various cyclone/hurricane disaster relief

educational and Development initiatives such as AID and ASHA

catalyzed several million dollars of pledges for Shankara Eye Foundation's Vision 2020 project through concerts across the USA in 2014

supported cultural and spiritual endeavors in Washington DC, San Jose, Seattle, and Pamona (NY)

championed and conducted camps for over 31,000 rural children in Tamil Nadu, India through Sarva Shiksha Abhyas (a Government of India organization)

conducted numerous educative lecture-demos for students of various schools and colleges in USA and India.

around the world

Ravikiran has performed literally across the world—USA, Canada, France, UK, Holland, Poland, Austria, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Germany, Yugoslavia, Slovakia, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Japan, Hungary and Qatar and has introduced Carnatic music in Slovenia, Brazil, Czech Republic & Croatia. Venues include:

Theatre de la Ville (Paris)

Vienna Palace (Austria)

Tate Modern Gallery (London)

National Theatre (Melbourne, Australia)

Europalia Festival, Belgium

Institute of World Music (New York)

India Gate Festival, Delhi

Oji Hall (Tokyo, Japan)

The Millennium Festival (UK)

Autumn Festival (Paris, France)

Brisbane Festival (Australia)

Bangalore International Fest, India

Harbor-front Fest (Toronto, Canada)

House of World Culture (Berlin, Germany)

Radio France Festival, Montpellier

Esplanade Festival, Singapore

Festivals of India (France, Germany & Switzerland)

Masters of Indian music (Budapest, Hungary)

Ghent Festival, Belgium

India-Amsterdam Fest (Netherlands)

Festival da Pablo Casals (Prades, France)

Indo-Brazil Festival, Brazil

Madison Festival, USA



awards and titles

Ravikiran received a fellowship from the Music Academy, Madras at age two, and was awarded the title of *Arul Isai Selvan* at the age of six.

He has been the first or the youngest to win many awards, some of which include:

International

Millennium Festival Top Five (Millennium Commission, Government of UK)
 Harvard Sangeet Award (Harvard University, USA)
 Citation from City of Houston (USA)
 Citation from City of Tulsa (USA)
 Proclamation of “Annual Melharmony Day” - City of Middleton (USA)
 Sangeeta Ratnakara (Cleveland, USA)
 Chitravina Vidya Varidhi (Perth, Australia)

Vadya Ratnakara (Austin, USA)

Best Contemporary World Album (New Age Voice, USA)

National

Sangeet Natak Akademi Award
 Sanskriti Award (Sanskriti Foundation)
 Star of India Award (Wisdom International)
 Kalaimamani (Tamil Nadu State)
 Kumar Gandharva Samman (Madhya Pradesh State)
 Rotary Lifetime Achievement Award

Ravikiran has also been presented with titles and honors from organizations, such as The Music Academy, Madras, Krishna Gana Sabha, Parthasarathy Swami Sabha, Karthik Fine Arts, SAFE, Nadabrahma, and Trinity Mirror.

key contributions and achievements

introduced new techniques blending vocal and instrumental features which placed the *chitravina* on the world music map

brought back the traditional name, *chitravina* to the instrument (it was called *gotuvadyam* in recent times)

introduced teflon-slides in world music

designed a new version of the chitravina called *navachitravina*

established the Musicians’ Benevolent Fund in 1994

actively involved in advocating and creating plans and projects for cultural renaissance in the country at the educational, corporate and media levels

created a first-of-its-kind classical music ensemble, *Vintage Virtuosos* to specially popularize masterpieces

organized a non-stop 72-hour relay concert festival at the age of 20 for world peace.

produced diverse educational and entertainment audio and video albums for students and music lovers.

penned widely read articles on various subjects including several in his own blog at <http://ravikiranmusic.blogspot.com/>